

**SUBJECT  
MASTER**

Filed on:

CONFIDENTIAL FILE



10 DOWNING STREET  
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

cc AC  
PB  
JP  
PMcF

Faxed to all 1330 23/9

23 September 1997

Dear Ken,

### CONVERSATION WITH DAVID TRIMBLE, 23 SEPTEMBER

The Prime Minister spoke to Trimble on the telephone this morning for about ten minutes. The atmospherics were a little less good on both sides than in previous recent conversations.

The Prime Minister began by saying that the last week had clearly gone well for Trimble. Trimble agreed, but said that he was nervous about the proceedings today. A lot of people on his side were "on the edge" about it.

The Prime Minister asked what was happening on the procedural motion. Trimble said that there was a serious difficulty about decommissioning. The British Government appeared to be unwilling to sign up to the language they and the Irish Government had put out a week previously. It had even been claimed to him by an NIO official that the Government was opposed to this language. The Prime Minister said that, if this language was in the procedural motion in strong terms, Sinn Fein would no doubt be unwilling to sign up to it. Was it not better from the UUP point of view for Sinn Fein to be signed up to the commitments in the procedural motion?

Trimble said that Sinn Fein did not have to agree the procedural motion for it to achieve sufficient consensus. It was more important for him that the plenary sign up clearly to the Anglo/Irish language. If this language was removed from the motion at the insistence of the Irish Government, the ground would be cut from under the UUP's feet and it would become known that this had happened. This was the main issue. There were four other smaller points the UUP had. One was very minor, and could be conceded straight away (he did not specify). The UUP had a difficulty about consent in a preliminary paragraph, but he was not sure where they now stood. This was in any case their problem, not one for the UUP. On chairmanships, the UUP would hold to its position until the wording on decommissioning had been resolved.

CONFIDENTIAL

WJ



## CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

The Prime Minister said that he was worried about the way things were going. If the procedural motion could be tied up satisfactorily, would the UUP be in the process? Trimble said that he had been unable to discuss seriously with anyone the issues of the format and agenda of the substantive talks. So if the three strands were launched, it would be very untidy. These things would have to be discussed further in the Business Committee. But the UUP would be in the process. He hoped that, by Wednesday, there would be agreement on the procedural motion and it could be nodded through and the three strands launched. The Business Committee would then have to discuss agenda and format.

The Prime Minister repeated that he was increasingly anxious about the process. If the negotiations themselves proved to be as difficult as the preliminaries, we might have to look at a different way of proceeding. He had made promises to the Irish Governments about the UUP being in the process quickly. Nevertheless, if the three strands could be launched tomorrow, we would at least be back on track. Could he be sure that this would happen? Trimble said that the Prime Minister could make clear to the Irish that, if there was agreement to the procedural motion including the wording on decommissioning, the procedural motion could be nodded through on Wednesday. As far as future proceedings were concerned, there were bound to be difficult discussions, for example on the agenda, and they could take a week or two to resolve. He understood the Prime Minister's point that a different way forward might have to be found. One problem for the UUP was that other parties, including the Irish, would not talk to them. Too much had to be done through the NIO. More widely, if the Irish Government always took Sinn Fein's side and shielded them from problems, this would be difficult. He hoped the Irish Government would be ready to deal with the UUP.

The Prime Minister said that he thought the Irish were indeed ready to do this. But there was of course a struggle going on within the IRA. In the absence of real evidence, the UUP's challenge to Sinn Fein was not likely to succeed. Trimble said that the NIO would say there was no evidence, but there would be more bombs, and perhaps shootings. The evidence would therefore come soon enough. The Prime Minister said that if there was such evidence, the position would of course be different. He could certainly assure Trimble that he would not accept any threats of violence from Sinn Fein in the talks process.

Trimble returned to the procedural motion. The UUP needed to be seen to be getting some points on the board as the talks progressed. The Prime Minister said that the UUP had scored a lot of points in the last ten days. Trimble agreed but again referred to his internal problems, and the likelihood of a new attack by Paisley. The Prime Minister said that, in his view, ordinary unionist voters were on Trimble's side. He asked again whether, if the procedural motion

CONFIDENTIAL



## CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

could be sorted out satisfactorily, it could be got through tomorrow, with no ifs and buts. Discussion of format and agenda could then start immediately. Trimble confirmed this. He hoped that there were no nasty surprises on the agenda in particular. He was made suspicious by the refusal of the NIO to talk to him about it.

Trimble added that he was worried that the IRA were bugging his telephone line. He and the Prime Minister might need to find another way of communicating. The Prime Minister said that there ought to be ways of ensuring that his line was not bugged.

The Prime Minister repeated in conclusion that he was very concerned about the slow progress that was being made, and was wondering whether the talks could be carried through in this way. But he did not want to get into a purely bilateral process, since he believed this would only suit the extremists. Trimble agreed.

Comment

It was clear from this conversation that the major UUP problem is the decommissioning wording. Trimble was explicit that, if this could be resolved, the procedural motion could be nodded through on Wednesday. I would be grateful if you could keep me closely in touch with progress, in case the Prime Minister needs to intervene again. Meanwhile I have relayed the main points of the above to Paddy Teahon in the Taoiseach's office (he had told me that the Taoiseach was becoming very agitated last night), although without revealing how explicit Trimble was about readiness to nod the procedural motion through tomorrow.

On a separate point, I wonder whether we might give Trimble some help with his fears about his telephone. Perhaps the Cabinet Office could look into this urgently.

I am copying this letter to John Grant (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Jan Polley (Cabinet Office), Sir John Kerr in Washington and Veronica Sutherland in Dublin. DCO

  
JOHN HOLMES

Ken Lindsay Esq  
Northern Ireland Office

CONFIDENTIAL